



Arkansas Department of Health

4815 West Markham Street • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205-3867 • Telephone (501) 661-2000
Governor Asa Hutchinson
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

April 6, 2020

In light of on-going COVID-19 concerns and Governor Hutchinson's recent State of Emergency Declaration, the Arkansas Department of Health and the Arkansas State Board of Physical Therapy recommend **voluntary suspension of all in-person non-emergency or non-essential care or services to patients until further notice**. This recommendation is subject to change at the discretion of the Governor and Secretary of Health.

The only care or services to be provided at this time should be emergency or essential in nature. We also recommend you consider telehealth options to treat patients you would not be able to treat in person due to this guidance.

This is consistent with the US Department of Homeland Security report on March 16th with updated Coronavirus guidance for America which identified physical therapist and assistants as "Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers". More information about the federal guidance is available at:

https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA-Guidance-on-Essential-Critical-Infrastructure-Workers-1-20-508c.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1nrXpoPEIg40jdn4UH-k_TTeZK8-SAP4SyDtWc85xnicLOTjz1tN6O-4E

Recommended guidelines suggest delaying treatment for high-risk patients who meet any of the following criteria:

- Recently returned from an area in the U.S. with widespread COVID-19 infection or traveled internationally within the last 14 days;
- Present with a fever of 100.4+°F, cough, shortness of breath or other symptoms typical of COVID-19;
- Aged 65 and older;
- Have compromised immune systems and/or present with chronic disease (ASA 2 and above)

Universal precautions are to be strictly followed to minimize the possibility of disease transmission. Here are several suggestions:

- Remove magazines and children's toys from your waiting room areas to help prevent the spread of the virus.
- Provide a single sign-in sheet per patient and/or sanitize digital screens and/or stylus after each patient.
- Make sure your office is sanitized more frequently and that exam tables, rooms, etc., are sanitized after each patient.

- Instruct your patients and staff to practice social distancing in the waiting room, have some patients wait in their cars and/or work out some other alternative waiting room procedure.

Patients with an acute respiratory illness may present for treatment. It may not be possible to know the cause of any patient's illness, so it is important to follow this guidance and standard precautions at all times. It is highly recommended that you not provide in person treatment to anyone who has a current acute respiratory illness at present; however, if they have already entered your facility, upon identification, use the following advice:

- Patients with an acute respiratory illness should be identified at check-in and placed in a single-patient room with the door kept closed.
- Seek to prevent the transmission of respiratory infections in healthcare settings by adhering to respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette.
- Offer a disposable surgical mask to persons who are coughing, and provide tissues and no-touch receptacles for used tissue disposal.
- Ill persons should wear a surgical mask when outside the patient room.
- Personnel assessing a patient with influenza-like or other respiratory illness should wear disposable surgical facemask*, non-sterile gloves, gown, and eye protection (e.g., goggles) to prevent exposure.
- Patients and workers should perform hand hygiene (e.g., hand washing with non-antimicrobial soap and water, alcohol-based hand rub, or antiseptic hand wash) after possible contact with respiratory secretions and contaminated objects/materials.
- Routine cleaning and disinfection strategies used during influenza seasons can be applied to the environmental management for COVID-19. More information can be found at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/gl_environinfection.html

Collective actions taken by the community can help deter the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus in Arkansas. By rescheduling elective procedures, professionals can do our part to prevent community spread, as well as help to preserve the limited supply of personal protective equipment that is critical for frontline healthcare personnel responding to this pandemic.

ADH has activated a call center to answer questions from health care providers and the public about the novel coronavirus. Please call 1-800-803-7847 or email ADH.CoronaVirus@arkansas.gov with any questions.

For the most up-to-date information and support, visit our website: www.healthy.arkansas.gov

For the most up-to-date information and guidance on COVID-19 in Arkansas, visit: <https://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programs-services/topics/novel-coronavirus>